

Have you ever felt discriminated against during your career in dentistry?



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BDJ Team's reader panel responds.

Nicola Grant

Dental nurse and university student

During my first few months as a trainee, I experienced discrimination from a male patient who asked that I should leave the room as the discussion was between the dentist and himself and did not concern me. I can't be sure if it was because I'm a woman or a nurse but it felt like it was probably both. Thankfully, my dentist at the time stood his ground and informed the patient I was a member of the dental team and would be staying for any discussions. I know some dentists may not have taken that approach. I felt validated and respected, which especially as a trainee was worth its weight in gold.

Dominika Jaslikowska

Former dental nurse, biomedical science graduate, university student

While working as a dental nurse a few years ago, I worked with a dentist who made me feel very uncomfortable. He would make inappropriate comments even in front of patients; he made me feel so intimidated. He would also try to make me feel really stupid. When I said I am applying to study dentistry he laughed; I didn't understand why

and instead of brushing it off it knocked my confidence.

I felt like I couldn't escape it. If I walked out I would be branded as 'unprofessional', I felt trapped when working with him. I kept telling myself 'it's only a temporary job, I don't have to work with him forever' - that's what kept me going.

Things took a turn for the worse. I would often come home crying, so I decided to tell my superior. Being a woman I thought she would totally understand it. Unfortunately, nothing was done and I felt absolutely humiliated. That's when I decided to leave.

Now looking back at it, I should have never stayed and I wish I'd done more about it to prevent the next victim. I would advise others: please don't ever feel like you have to stay in a toxic place, there are always other options.

Amy Davis

Dental hygienist and therapist, tutor

I would say (thankfully) the only time or rather reason I have felt some form of discrimination during my career in dentistry as a dental hygienist therapist is from some (not all!) dentists towards me when they are aware that my role is 'just' a DHT.

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Kate Peysner

Dental hygienist and therapist, clinical tutor

I have experienced no discrimination in any form in dentistry: no race or gender issues, no sexuality problems. I was still offered a job that was miles away from home despite having no driving licence, and I've been able to take parental leave as required to look after poorly children. This exercise has made me consider whether or not mine is a story representative of the whole of dentistry, or whether luck, or the fact of my ethnicity, has been so seemingly powerful to have overcome any possibility of discrimination.

In my pre-dental life I did experience one incidence of sexual harassment in the workplace, and one issue around being a parent that ultimately forced me to leave a university course. The latter was notable as this took place in 2010 and my mother had had the exact same experience in 1978 (apparently things do still move very slowly in that respect!).

Noor Al-Helou

Foundation dentist

As an Arab Muslim woman, I have experienced discrimination on a number of occasions. Most of the time it has been verbal and I often feel that the person may not have realised what they have said is inappropriate and constitutes discrimination. The most frequent comment I get is being questioned about my career ambitions. I often get told that most Muslim women in dentistry want to work part time in order to have multiple children, and have no interest in pursuing further training, and therefore I must have a similar mindset. I find these comments extremely wounding as a person who has always had a strong work ethic and who has worked very hard to get to the position I am

in now. I also think that often comments such as these could result in many Muslim women feeling discouraged about pursuing their interests and progressing in their chosen career path. It is also a damaging narrative that if a woman or a man chooses to work part time or have children that this equates to a lack of ambition or career aspiration. My hopes for the future are that as the industry diversifies further there will be a greater variety of individuals from varying backgrounds and that discriminatory behaviours and comments like these could be reduced, and ultimately eliminated from the working environment.

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Ammar Ahmed Zaki

Dentist (DCT2)

There have been occasions during my career in dentistry where I have felt discriminated against due to being from a Pakistani Muslim background. There are often team building exercises that are not catered to individuals such as myself, making it more difficult to bond with the working team. Feeling left out as a team member can often lead to individuals not pursuing roles that they may

have once considered quite highly. I think it is an important area to consider as ultimately it can lead to less diverse teams that do not represent the industry. I also keep a beard for religious reasons and have been told that this constitutes unprofessionalism. I feel that when individuals make remarks such as these, they do not realise that this can constitute discrimination, as individuals have a freedom to express their beliefs. I believe diversity within working teams allows for greater tolerance of individuals from different backgrounds and with varying experiences. It can also be beneficial when treating patients, as we are more able to understand their unique set of circumstances and desires.

Laura Hinds

Former dental nurse, dental therapist

I'm lucky in that I haven't experienced discrimination; all the principals I have worked for have been very supportive as have the dental teams.

Sometimes I can find patients may prefer to see a male dentist for their restorations as opposed to myself, but in general so far in

my career I've been surrounded by a great network of people.

This being said, there are colleagues of mine who have had different experiences to me, and it's not to say it's very prevalent, however, I believe everyone just needs to be aware of the situation, as controversial as it may be.

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41407-021-0578-z>